

NO PURSUERS WERE YET IN SIGHT

“Little Feller”

BY ELMORE ELLIOTT PEEKE

THE fugitive breathed his horse on the summit of the Little Ten Pins. Through the heat-dance of the tenuous Arizona atmosphere his spy-glass revealed the five flat-roofed adobes of Escovedo, forty miles to the south. He had breakfasted there that morning.

No pursuers were yet in sight. But “Kentucky” Harrod had no illusions on this score. The four Tollivers were human bloodhounds when aroused, and they had sworn not to cut their hair or shave their cheeks or sleep in a bed or sit down to a table for meat until their murdered brother Larkin was avenged.

“A fool oath, too, as I look at it,” soliloquized Kentucky. “Whiskers won’t help ‘em none to ketch me.”

He nibbled a cracker and took a swallow or two of tepid water from a bottle labeled “Old Bluegrass Pride.” He then drew from its holster a revolver that resembled a baby cannon—a forty-eight-ounce Colt, with a seven-and-a-half-inch barrel—and slowly turned the cylinder.

The six huge, blunt-nosed bullets which nestled in the chambers brought a glow to his black eyes. *They* were friends that would never fail him. So, too, was his Winchester repeater, and after inspecting it also he closed his dust-caked, broken-nailed fingers around the rusty-brown receiver with something like affection.

“Gid-ap, Petey!” said he at last. “You and me air due to go some ‘twixt now and night.”

This habit of talking aloud to himself and his horse broke the oppressive silence of the fastnesses in which he spent a good share of his time, playing hide-and-seek with the minions of the law.

A mile-long declivity let him down to the plain again, and he was adjusting his impedimenta for a canter when he suddenly gave the reins a pull that nearly set the startled Petey on his haunches. In the middle of the trail, all but under the horse’s hoofs, lay a baby, vigorously kicking its pink-socked feet, waving its

fat hands in a jerky, uncertain fashion, and squinting its blue eyes at the dazzling, cloudless sky.

After emitting a sonorous and somewhat profane ejaculation Kentucky slowly dismounted, dropped to one knee, and stared blankly at his find. Not since leaving his old home back in Kentucky, twenty-five years before, when his mother stood at the gate with his tiny sister in her arms, had a baby been presented directly and imperatively to his attention. Therefore, no monster, real or mythical, could have astounded him more than this atom of humanity, alone and yet alive, in the midst of this inhospitable solitude.

"Bah-bah!" cooed the little one, at sight of Kentucky's sharp, leathern face and drooping black mustachios.

"What's that?" demanded the startled man.

"Bah-bah!"

Kentucky was speechless for a moment.

"Damme, if he didn't say 'papa'! Why, little feller, I ain't your papa! I ain't nobody's papa. I don't know whar your papa is, nuther. Nur your mommy. How come you hyer, anyway? Did you drap out of a wagon, unbeknownst? If you did, I reckon your mommy will be back-along soon to git you. I'll loaf around a spell, anyhow, to see. This is my busy day or I'd lope you down to Gentryville right off, where there's women folks that know how to take keer of small fry like you."

The trail through the Little Tens is a short cut from Antelope to Gentryville, seldom used on account of its roughness, however, except by gentlemen in a hurry, like Mr. Harrod himself. Yet some one else had unquestionably used it, and that very recently. But what mother could be so careless as to lose her baby? Or was this bantling one of those shuttle-cocks of misfortune whom mothers are sometimes willing to lose? An outcast himself, Kentucky gazed at the innocent face with a quickened interest.

"Yes, little pard," he repeated, "I'll loaf around a spell, just as I said. Meanwhile, your folks may come. If they don't, why— But, pshaw! what's the use of borrowin' trouble—eh?"

He led his horse behind a boulder the size of a house, a few rods aside from the trail. Here he waited an hour. No one

came. In his heart he had expected no one to come. He had waited merely to salve his conscience and to decide upon which horn of this unexpected dilemma he should impale himself.

"Little Feller," said he, soberly, as if talking to an adult, as he again knelt by the foundling, "it's you or me. Ef I stay hyer, waitin' for your mommy to come, the Tollivers will git me sure. Ef I leave you hyer, and the Tollivers don't come before to-morrow mawnin' and find you, you'll be dead from cold and starvation. Ef I take you with me, you'll die anyway. You can't eat jerked meat. You ain't got no teeth to speak of. Them two little grains of rice in your upper goom air no good fer chawin'. Thar's nothin' below fer 'em to hit ag'in."

He touched the child for the first time, gently pushing back its upper lip to take a look at the tiny teeth he had observed when it laughed.

"Bah-bah! Bah-bah!" it exclaimed, lustily, and tossed its legs and arms in ecstasy.

The man drew back as if stung.

"The little cuss thought I was goin' to pick him up!" he murmured, and wiped a sweat from his brow that no mere heat had produced.

As he arose his quick eye discovered a foreign object on the landscape, three or four hundred yards away. His telescope resolved it into a dead Indian. The mystery of the babe's presence immediately cleared. The red devils had attacked a party of whites; the whites had repelled them, but in their hurried retreat had lost the babe.

"Little Feller," said Kentucky, presently, "I've got a better plan for you. I'll take you on a piece."

It was a strange sight that the burning Arizona sun looked down upon—Kentucky Harrod, cattle-rustler, horse-thief, three-card-monte sharp, and all-round "bad man," riding along with a babe in his arms. He held it gingerly, as if it were a case of eggs, fearful that the limp little body would part in the middle or the head come loose from the neck.

For a time he dared not let Petey move faster than a walk. But, gaining confidence in the stability of the little body and realizing that this slow pace was

courting death for himself, he presently spurred the animal into a canter. To his surprise Little Feller accepted the wave-like motion with a spread of his rosebud mouth into an unmistakable grin. Kentucky then ventured another touch of the rowels, whereupon the youngling actually gurgled with joy and, reaching out a fat little hand, fastened it upon Kentucky's piratical mustache.

"Cuss me!" ejaculated Harrod. "Who'd'a thought the little skeesicks could have retch that fur!" And he bowed his head so as not to loosen the baby's grasp, for, strange to say, there was something soothing about it.

But finally the hand fell away; the white lids, with their long, dark fringe, slowly closed over the blue eyes; the lips met and formed a crescent. Little Feller was asleep.

The plan of which he had spoken was to deposit his charge at the crossing of the Patterson ranch trail. Charlie Patterson's factotum, Candido Muñoz, nicknamed Gallinito (Chicken-heart), made almost daily trips to Antelope for the mail, or a strap, or a bottle of whiskey. He *might* come along that afternoon, or early the next morning, and thus find the babe in time to save its life.

On reaching the cross-trail, Kentucky slipped gently from his saddle and laid Little Feller in the shadow of a rock, close to the path, but not in it, lest the hoofs of Candido's pony work cruel havoc. Then he fumbled with his clumsy fingers at a couple of safety-pins until the babe's white quilt was snugly adjusted about its

feet, hands, and head, for, though the days were hot, the nights were cool.

At this juncture Little Feller stirred and began to make a sucking sound with his lips. Kentucky paused. In spite of his inexperience with paternity, the sign was unmistakable.

"He's a-dreamin' of his mommy's breast!" he whispered.

The sight and sound were too much for him. He drew a cracker from his pocket, ground it to dust in his dirty palm, and added water, drop by drop, until he had a starchy paste. This he applied with his forefinger to the moving lips. But Little Feller turned his mouth aside and whimpered.

"Tain't no delicacy, I know, but it's all I got," observed Kentucky, sadly. Then, after a moment of silence: "Little Feller, I hate to do it, but I got to leave you. You're on'y a baby and

I'm a man. Ag'in, life ain't nothin' much to you, while to me it air considerable sweet, though you mightn't believe it. You git my p'int? Now all you got to do is just to go to sleep ag'in. Maybe Candido or some one else will find you. And if they don't, the angels shorely will."

He hesitated a moment. Then, as if fleeing from a plague, he leaped into the saddle, sank his spurs into Petey's flanks with a savagery which surprised that animal, and clattered away.

At a hundred yards he stopped short. His conscience was not a delicately adjusted instrument. Fleecing a tenderfoot with loaded dice or stacked cards was the



KENTUCKY HARROD

pastime of a summer hour. Rustling a bunch of mavericks was merely a filip to his spirits—a kind of emotional cocktail. Larkin Tolliver was merely the last of several men whose souls he had hurled into eternity. Yet at this moment he heard a still, small voice speak from within.

"But I cain't take the little cuss along!" he argued with the Voice. "I cain't feed him. Don't know as I kin feed myself. And I've lost a powerful lot of time as it is."

Again the Voice spoke, and again the man listened.

"Yes, it does look as if I war playin' it low-down on the little feller," he admitted, slowly. "And when he wakes up it will be dark and cold, and he'll say 'Bah-bah!' and wonder where I've gone."

Tears suddenly filled his eyes; his heart leaped within him, and standing in his stirrups, with his hat removed and his eyes fixed upon a snowy cloudlet, he cried, "I'll take him to Patterson's if the coyotes pick my bones fer it!"

Patterson's lay thirty miles to the west. The detour involved a delay and an exposure which might spell death for a man with a price upon his head. But just one thought kept tap-tapping at his consciousness: Little Feller had called him papa and clung to his mustache.

When he reached the ranch it was long after dark, with the lop-sided moon lifting an inflamed, dull-red face above the eastern horizon. But, alack! no lights shone from the house, and Kentucky bitterly conjectured that Patterson and his crew were out on the round-up and might be absent several days.

One hope remained. Charlie Patterson, being of a luxurious nature, kept poultry and milch-cows, and somebody might have been left behind to take care of these—perhaps Gallinito or the Chinese cook. Neither of these gentlemen would make ideal nurses, but beggars must not be choosers.

Leaving babe and horse at a short distance until he could ascertain the lay of the land, Kentucky cautiously advanced. No one was in sight. Doors and windows were locked. The bunk-house was empty, and there were no horses in the shed or corral—conclusive evidence that the place was tenantless.

The outlaw paused, swearing softly at the tangled skein of his fortunes. Candido was probably over at Crossman's, playing chuck-a-luck. Yet he would certainly be back in the morning to milk, for Kentucky made out the dark bulk of two cows in their corral; and if the little one were left in the right spot—say the kitchen, where the milk-pails were doubtless kept—he would almost certainly be found.

Kentucky returned for Petey and Little Feller, and rode boldly up to the rear of the house. The kitchen door yielded to his weight. Lighting one of the half-dozen lanterns which hung on the wall, he proceeded to look about, for of course the babe would have to be fed to stay him through the night. Luckily, the milk was right at hand, three pails of it standing in a cooling-trough of water. Half filling a dipper, he laid Little Feller in the hollow of his left arm and tendered him a teaspoonful of the inviting fluid. But the babe impatiently rejected it as he had the cracker.

"He wants it warm, of course!" ejaculated Harrod. "I've fergot all I ever knew about nussin'."

The big range was stone cold, and there was no time to fire it up. So the resourceful Kentucky took down another lantern, removed the globe, and twisted off the frame, thus converting it into an oil-stove. Meanwhile Little Feller, who, according to all traditions, should have been bawling lustily, merely whimpered in a subdued, minor key which strangely stirred the man's heart. It reminded him of the aftermath of a flogged puppy's grief.

In five minutes the milk was warm, and Kentucky, with hands that fairly trembled—for the child was evidently too weak from starvation to cry—again filled the spoon. Little Feller had presumably not before been introduced to a spoon, and seemed not anxious to make its acquaintance. But presently, getting a taste of the milk, his lips began to work vigorously; he sucked and nuzzled like a little pig, one hand tightly clasping his nurse's left forefinger, the other slowly opening and closing.

The feeding was a twenty-minute operation. Then Kentucky, with a smile on his face that rivaled that on the babe's

for contentment, laid his charge on the floor and rose to straighten his cramped back. As he did so there came simultaneously the report of a rifle outside and the crashing of a bullet through the window which fanned his cheek.

Instantly extinguishing the lantern with a blow from his hand, Kentucky sprang to the door—in time to see Gallinito, whose sombrero betrayed his identity, putting spurs to his horse. For the fraction of a second Harrod hesitated. Then realizing that he must have been recognized, and that the Mexican's escape would set the whole Patterson outfit hot-foot upon his trail within a few hours, he drew his six-shooter and fired.

The light was very bad, but he aimed by instinct rather than sight, and Gallinito somersaulted from the saddle in ghastly simulation of an acrobat. For a moment the slayer watched the dark, formless object on the ground; then, when it remained motionless, he stepped inside again, apparently as unmoved as if he had only put a period to a coyote's yap-ping. But after relighting the lantern he passed over to the shed, emerged with a horse-blanket in his hand, and covered the dead man.

"You made me call your hand, Gallinito," he murmured. "Playin' fer the price on a man's head requires a stiddier nerve than yourn was."

He re-entered the kitchen and gazed at the babe long and steadily, one-half of his thin face and hawk's-bill nose in deep shadow. Sadness rather than badness was the dominating expression.

"I've tuck a life. The least I kin do now is to try to save one. Little Pard, there'll be no Gallinito hyer to-morrow mawnin' to milk and find you. So *I'll* take you, fer better or fer worse, as the sayin' is; and God help your pore little soul, fer better will be bad enough."

He emptied the water from his bottle and filled it with milk. Next, foraging through the kitchen and adjoining store-room, he collected a loaf of bread, a flitch of bacon, a can of corn, and several cans of sardines. Then blowing out the lantern, he strode off with his passenger and his plunder.

He would have liked to ride all night, to make up lost time, but it was imperative that Petey be rested and grazed. So

he went into camp about four miles away, near one of Patterson's wells, tethering Petey and sharing his poncho with the babe.

Sleep, however, did not come as readily as usual. For almost the first time in his devil-may-care, neither-look-before-nor-after career he worried. But the source of his worry was not himself; it was Little Feller. After reaching his haven in the Wolf Den country and building himself a shanty, or sharing that of some other fugitive, he felt sure of his ability to care for the child. But *en route*, when he had to keep moving up to the limits of Petey's endurance, what then—after the present supply of milk was gone?

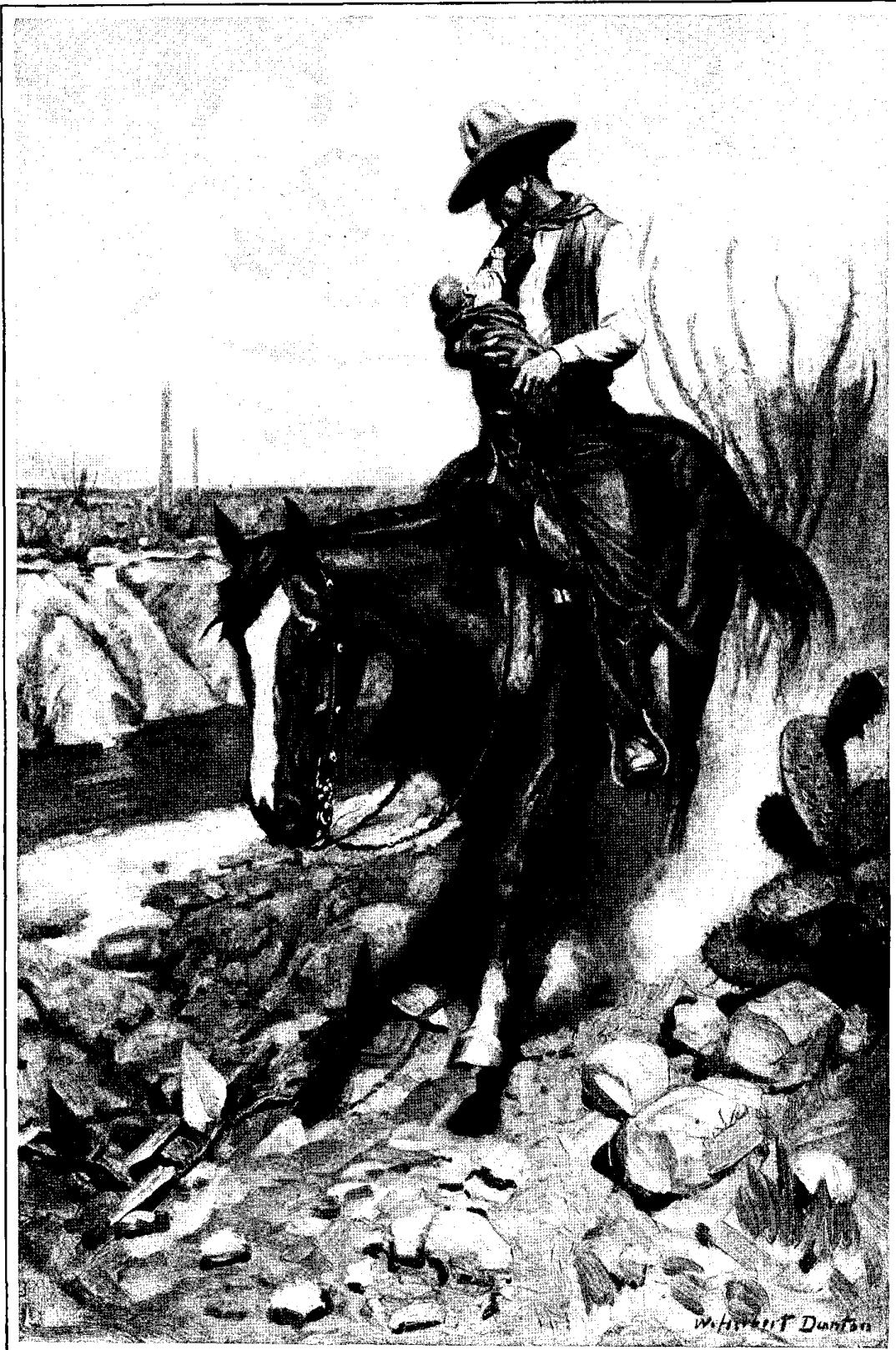
He rose at dawn, heated the milk with shavings and splinters from the well-eurb, fed the babe, and was swinging rhythmically across the grassy plain before the Ten Pins had fairly shaken the mist from their peaks. With his glass he made out smoke in the west, which he supposed rose from Charlie Patterson's camp; but nowhere, not even in the south, was a horseman to be seen.

The day was hot, and about noon, when he thought another feed due his ward, the milk came forth from the bottle slowly, in a thick and lumpy condition. Even Kentucky knew better than to put such stuff into a baby's delicate stomach.

In the variegated course of his life Harrod had never before suffered such a depression of spirits as at this moment, with Little Feller sucking at the empty air and jerking his clenched hands to and fro. A lump rose in his throat, and suddenly, almost involuntarily, he laid his weathered lips against the little one's velvety cheek, and murmured, thickly, "My pore little pard!"

He rode on until he reached a stream—the last stream in forty miles—and then went into camp. It was only three o'clock by the sun, and by rights he should have ridden until midnight; for in his mind's eye he could see the Tollivers, the relentless, unforgiving Tollivers, spurring doggedly on toward the north, with a minimum of food and sleep for both man and beast.

He camped because he knew that Little Feller was failing—starving. He no longer cooed, dimpled, and laughed when Kentucky snapped his fingers and whis-



Drawn by W. Herbert Dunton

Half-tone plate engraved by C. E. Hart

IT HAD NOT YET LEARNED TO LOVE THE GAME CALLED LIFE

tled and crowed like a rooster, and called him all the pet names he could think of—Little Feller, Little Pard, Skeesicks, Tadpole, and so on. Also, in spite of the heat, there was a coldness about his hands and feet which Harrod had observed in grown men when the life-flame was burning low.

So, with his rifle in his hand, he crept through the willows fringing the stream, looking for some living thing—anything that could be converted into broth.

After about an hour he spied a ground-squirrel sitting upright beside its burrow, its little paws folded across its buffy breast, its big eyes glistening in the sun. Three successive times the man drew a bead on it, but his hands—hands that were strangers to unmanly tremors, even where a fellow-being was his target—shook so that he dared not risk a shot. At last, however, gritting his teeth and rendering his whole body rigid, he reduced the weaving motion of the front sight to a minimum, and pulled the trigger. At the same instant he closed his eyes, like the rankest tenderfoot.

With infinite pains, that nothing might be wasted, he dressed his pitiable quarry, built a fire, and soon had a stew going in the dipper. He held the vessel in his hands, not daring to trust it to a support of stones, which might crack from the heat and spill the precious contents. So, skimming and stirring and adding water almost drop by drop, lest he thin it too much, he watched the cooking with eyes which streamed and smarted from the smoke, now cursing his trembling fingers, now murmuring words that sounded like a prayer.

At last, after allowing himself several infinitesimal tastes to test it, he judged the concoction to be done; and taking Little Feller on his lap, he anxiously offered him a few drops of the broth in a spoon. The babe accepted the strange food—even tried to swallow the spoon itself, and fairly quivered in eagerness for more. Kentucky could not see to give a second helping until the mist cleared from his eyes.

“Feelin’ pretty good now, eh, Little Feller!” he observed, when the child was satisfied. “Course you air. You got a good nuss, though he don’t wear no lace cap. He ain’t none of your one-idee’d

people. If there ain’t no milk he’s got sense enough to try sunthin’ else, and he war bright enough to guess that gopher soup would just about hit the right spot. Most people wouldn’t call me good company fer a young feller like you. But I ain’t the worst you might have—not by no means. I won’t deceive you. I ain’t no Sunday-school boy. But I want to explain one thing.

“I didn’t want to kill Lark Tolliver no more’n I did Gallinito. I had nothin’ agin him—not a thing. In fact, I liked him. But we had a little quoll over cyards, and after he got good and drunk he made his brags he’d shoot me on sight. I knowed he’d think better of it when he sobered up, so I kept away from him—rid out of town. I didn’t come back till the next day. But he hadn’t sobered up as soon as usual. I seen that as soon as he stepped out of the Hot Rivet with his face all flushed. So I watched him out o’ the tail of my eye. I waited till he drawed his gun, which is the last second a feller kin wait. Then I knowed it was him or me.

“Little Pard, it was him. But could I ‘a’ done anything else? You’d say no yourself if you could talk a little plainer. But Lark was a man of prop’ty, paid taxes and holped elect the shureff. And me—well, I war just Kentucky Harrod. So the shureff placards the county, and the remainin’ four Tollivers, sworn in as deputies, goes on a still hunt fer me.

The babe smiled and said, “Gloo-gul-goo!”

“That’s it. I see you git my drift. But it’s too late fer you and me to set up and talk politics any longer. We got to git an airy start in the mawnin’. So I’ll just build you a little wickiup out of these willers, to keep off that breeze, and we’ll turn in and git a good night’s sleep.”

But again he could not sleep. A strange excitement pervaded him. His pursuers, oddly enough, scarcely crossed his mind. He kept thinking how nearly he had missed that ground-squirrel at thirty feet, and began to doubt his ability to hit the next one.

About two o’clock he slipped his hand into the babe’s wraps and felt its feet. To his dismay, they were cold; so were the little hands. His first thought was to ad-

minister some more hot broth. Then it occurred to him that possibly the broth had not digested properly. For a moment his heart sank. A sick baby on his hands, alone on the wind-swept plains, leagues upon leagues from a human habitation, and no medicine!

Then, like a flash of inspiration, there came to him a scene he had once witnessed in an Apache village, in which a mother and her child were the two actors. Taking the hint, he mended the fire until it was burning briskly, and laid around its edge a dozen or more stones the size of a cocoanut. Next he dug a bowl-shaped hole in the earth and filled it with water carried from the stream in his hat. It took many hatfuls, for until the walls became soaked they absorbed the water almost as fast as he could supply it. By this time the stones were hot. He kicked them into the water, one by one, until it began to steam.

Then undressing Little Feller, he laid him in the bath. When his whole body was pink, Kentucky lifted him out, quickly dried him with his red neckerchief—the softest garment at hand—dressed him again, pinned him up in his blanket, and laid him away in the poncho. His reward—ample enough, indeed—was one of Little Feller's smiles.

In stripping the roly-poly body Kentucky had noticed for the first time a chain and locket which had hitherto been concealed by the babe's clothing. He tossed it aside at the time; but after the little one was asleep, having nothing else to do, he idly examined the trinket. On it was engraved the word "Willie."

This simple bit of information about the hitherto nameless babe affected the man strangely. It gave his charge a place in the world, as it were; definitely linked him with the great human family, from which he had been as isolated before, in his finder's mind, as an aerolite out of the heavens.

"Willie!" he murmured, gazing at the graven letters. "'William' is the hull of it, I s'pose, and some day, mebbe, they'd 'a' called him Bill."

Kentucky was not familiar with lockets, and it was some minutes before he discovered that this one was hinged and jointed, and could therefore be opened. Presently, inserting his thick thumb-nail,

he opened it. On the inside were two photographs—one of a man, the other of a woman—doubtless Willie's parents.

The man was Anson Tolliver.

Kentucky stared at the likeness a long time, without the movement of an eyelash. Then he laughed, not mirthfully, but with a harsh, cracked note, like the tame magpie down at Gentryville. The joke was on him. He recalled seeing Mrs. Anson Tolliver and a hired man drive off in a buckboard the morning of his trouble with Larkin; and Lark, before the quarrel, had told him that she was bound for Antelope, to visit her brother. Doubtless it was the news of Lark's death which had induced her to return to Gentryville by way of the short cut through the Ten Pins, where she had been attacked by the Indians.

So Little Feller, for whom he had jeopardized his life, was the son of a man who would shoot him down as ruthlessly as if he were a sheep-killing dog. In Anson Tolliver's eyes Kentucky Harrod was of no more account than a rattlesnake or a Gila monster; of less account even, for Anson shot these reptiles only as chance threw them in his path, while to shoot Kentucky he and his three brothers had abandoned business and all the ordinary pursuits of life, and had sworn to go unshorn until their man was under the sod.

For seven days now Kentucky had led the life of a wild beast, fleeing before his pursuers, hiding in solitary places, living on whatever food fell into his hands, often hungry, often thirsty, until at last the closing coils had forced him to play his last card—make a dash for the Wolf Den country, a region so desolate that even the Indians dreaded it. By this time, had it not been for the delays which the little foundling had forced upon him, he would have been within the purlieus of that haven where no sheriff dared show his face.

What was a babe's life, after all? Left where he had found it, this one would have quietly sunk into that sleep from which there is no awakening. It had not yet learned to love the game called life. When hungry, it puckered its lips; but food not forthcoming, it would gently slip into the great Unknown, without suffering, without regret.

But life, even such a life as he had lived, was sweet to Kentucky Harrod. He joyed in its adventures and hair-breadth escapes. To overcome an enemy, either by cunning or mere brute force, brought satisfaction. But beyond and better than all this was the dream that some day he might come into his own; that some day, somehow, he might hold up his head among other men, might stand on an equal footing with the Tollivers, for instance, and others of their kind.

This life, these dreams, he had now put in jeopardy for the sake of this babe. To provide it with milk he had lost precious hours. To ward off its chill of death he had built up a fire which might have emblazoned his whereabouts for miles across the level plain to a sleepless enemy. And this babe (the idea tapped at his brain over and over) was a son of Anson Tolliver. It would grow up—if it ever grew up—to remember him, not as its savior, but as the slayer of its uncle Larkin.

Dark thoughts flitted through his brain like ugly phantoms. Yet his innate nobility delivered him from temptation. The smoldering spark of paternity in his breast had been fanned to a flame and was not easily extinguished. And, presently, when he had parted the folds of the poncho and peeped at the innocent face within, an almost painful tenderness suffused him. What did it suspect of murder and revenge? It had laughed and cooed at him as at its own father; it had called him "Bah-bah." It clung to the hand that fed it. That the same hand had laid its uncle in the dust was of no significance.

So, when the man mounted Petey at break of day, Little Feller was in his arms—Little Feller, who required milk and broth in a land where men had sucked putrid bones; who wilted under the noonday sun and chilled by night; who asked so much and gave so little.

Yet that little was wonderfully sweet to Kentucky Harrod, whose motto had so long been, "It is more blessed to take than to give." Now, when he was giving all and taking nothing, he was strangely happy. Indeed, an ecstasy, a kind of delirium, possessed him. The way was smoothed before him. No more doubts,

no more temptations, assailed him. No shadow of regret tinged his reflections. The hour when he had pondered the abandonment of the little one seemed to have receded into a remote past.

That his refuge was still a hundred miles away seemed a trifle, not because he believed Providence would reward his good deed by seeing him safely through, but because he now cared so little whether he got through or not. It was not his getting through, but the babe's, which had become paramount. He was beginning to suspect that the babe's way through was south, not north; and more than once he halted his horse with the half-formed resolution of turning back.

Hence, when at noon, after feeding Little Feller half the remaining broth, he swept the landscape to the south with his glass, and descried four horsemen, at a distance of perhaps fifteen miles, his pulse scarcely quickened. He had no intention, however, of sacrificing himself. He still believed that justice was on his side, and he intended to sell his life as dearly as possible—to die by a bullet, not a rope.

He considered the feasibility of leaving the child where the father would find it. Such a stratagem would detach at least one of the party, and send him flying back to the land of baby-food. Yet the risk to Little Feller would be great. There was no trail here. The Tollivers, guided only by the creeks and springs which they knew the fugitive must follow, might easily pass the baby by, for there was no way of conspicuously marking its resting-place.

Moreover, the finding of the baby would only whet their appetites for vengeance. The Tollivers had been out on their man-hunt for a week now. Anson might or might not have learned of the loss of his babe. If he had not, he would naturally assume, on finding it here, that Kentucky had kidnapped it. If he had, he would assume that Kentucky had instigated the dastardly Indian attack.

So Harrod rode on, without haste, until he came to a depression in the ground inclosed by a circle of boulders—an ancient site of Indian ceremonials. A better fortress could scarcely have been devised, and here he calmly made ready for his enemies.

He built a hollow rectangle of stones in which Little Feller would be safe from stray bullets from any quarter. He led Petey inside, roped up a front foot, and threw him. Otherwise, the horse would be the first victim of the Tollivers' fire, and without him Kentucky's victory, should he by a miracle win, would be but a barren one. Moreover, with the horse concealed there was a bare chance of the party not discovering him. Then he sat down to wait.

An hour or so later his foes galloped out from behind a swell of ground half a mile away. Before they came within rifle-shot, however, they halted, and one of them lifted a field-glass. They were veteran campaigners in this grim business, and the Indian pow-wow place had evidently caught their attention. After a brief council they dismounted and proceeded on foot. They, too, realized the necessity of protecting their horses.

Kentucky waited, rifle in hand. He could not afford to waste a single cartridge by firing at an unduly long range; yet he wanted to get in one shot before the men dropped into the grass, as he knew they were likely to do at any minute. They had separated as widely as possible without endangering one another by cross-fire, and finally Kentucky picked out the man whom the sun made the fairest target of and lifted his rifle to his shoulder.

"Bah-bah!" he heard the babe babble.

The sound all but cost the startled man a premature shot. Lowering his weapon, he leveled his spy-glass upon his intended victim. It was truly papa—it was Anson Tolliver.

"All right, Little Feller!" he murmured. "I'll pick out your Uncle Bill, if it suits you better, though the sun air liable to blur my sights a little."

He shifted his position, aimed and fired. Big Bill Tolliver dropped, but not as a dead man drops, Kentucky perceived with a wave of chagrin. At the shot the other brothers had also dropped, and as the fugitive glanced about the field there was no sign of human presence.

Nevertheless a rifle cracked a few seconds later, and the besieged man's left arm suddenly became as numb and helpless as a paralytic's. It was a chance shot, of course, for he was not exposed;

but, deflected by a rock, the bullet had done its work.

"The cyards air stacked agin me!" muttered Harrod. "I'm due to lose."

In his bones he felt that his end was near. Still he was not afraid—merely vastly puzzled. Though sirocco and blizzard, alkali and whiskey, had given him the appearance of a man past his prime, he was only forty-two. He was young in both body and spirit. In spite of hard knocks, fortune had always smiled upon him. When it came to a show-down, he had always held the winning hand. Now he was due to lose.

His injured arm was useless, and whenever he changed position it swung back and forth with a curious creak. But it did not pain him much as yet, and he managed, shooting from a prone position, to manipulate his rifle fairly well with one hand. He shot deliberately, for the Tollivers in their dusty clothes were almost the color of the tall grass, and it was only now and then that he discovered anything to draw a bead against. Indeed, he half wished they would "rush" him and give him a chance to do some fancy work with his revolver, which was his favorite weapon.

The foe, on the other hand, could see even less of him. One or more of them usually fired when a shot of his gave them a clue to his position. Now and then they would pour in a fusillade, trusting to luck for a hit.

It was immediately after one of these broadsides that the sky suddenly streamed with what seemed millions of rockets, shoals upon shoals of them, like minnows back in the meadow creek in old Kentucky, swinging gracefully through their appointed arcs, and dropping showers of stars in their flight. Then quite as suddenly came blackness, as if an invisible hand had drawn a jetty veil across the empyrean dome.

Stunned and bewildered, hardly conscious of the act, Kentucky crawled over to the babe's bullet-proof and lifted him out with his one serviceable arm. Then getting his back to a rock, for he was very weary, he closed his eyes.

"Little Feller," he murmured, sleepily, "I just had a bad dream. If you'll put your hand agin my cheek I don't believe it will come ag'in. I ain't troubled with

dreams much, but it's so dark, and somehow so close to-night that--that I cain't breathe good; and it seems—it seems—"

He placed his hand over his aching chest, but it did not occur to him that the dampness there was from his own blood, for the Tollivers and his duel with them had faded from his consciousness.

Hours later—so he imagined—he awoke. It was still dark, but he could see figures moving about, now near, now far, now one, now a dozen. Finally one of them forced a flask between his teeth and he gradually became conscious of a pillow of some kind beneath his head and a blanket spread over his cold body. But still he could not make out what one of the men was whispering in his ear.

"Louder!" he exclaimed, impatiently.

The man still whispered, so it seemed, but after a second draught of whiskey the dying man caught the words.

"Kentuck! Kentuck! How did you come by that baby?"

"Little Feller?" he asked, with a supreme effort. "Found him in the Ten Pins. Injuns. He's a Tolliver. I've got to git him back home some way."

He moved his right arm, feeling for the babe. It was gone.

"Where is he?" he cried. "Bring him back. He's my pard. Bring him back, I say, or I'll pump you full of lead."

One of the men, sitting with his head between his knees, seemed to be weeping; but another one restored the babe to Kentucky's side.

"Now I'll tell you just how to take keer of him, fer I've got to ketch some

sleep, so we kin git an airy start. Make him some gopher soup. He likes milk best, but gopher soup will do. But it must be just so, not too hot ner too cold, not too thick ner too thin. And feed it out of the teaspoon, and not too fast. And ef he gits cold, give him an Injun bath, and rub him down with your bandanner."

The man who was weeping now fairly sobbed aloud, much to Kentucky's annoyance; but he was too weak to make any remonstrance. He was also too weak to figure out just how he had fallen into this strange company. So he went to sleep.

When he awoke he was rational. He recognized the four Tollivers. One by one they silently pressed his limp hand. Anson, with red eyes, tried to speak, but failed.

"Just one request, boys," said Kentucky, in a piping voice that he could scarce believe his own. "When he grows up and people tell him that Kentucky Harrod killed his uncle Lark, you—you tell him about—about this. I—I'd like to hold him just a minute, ef you don't care. You know, him and me has been campin' together fer sev'ral days, and he—he likes me."

They again laid Little Feller by his side. A faint smile lit Kentucky's pale, dewy face. He turned his head slightly until his lips rested against the curls of the baby's head, and then closed his eyes.

"Little Feller!" he murmured, contentedly.

Thus he passed into his long sleep.

